

1. A mold assembly for distributing a resin throughout a dry fiber preform to form a composite structure, said mold assembly comprising:
 - a first mold line tool supporting the dry fiber preform;
 - 10 a second mold line tool disposed on a portion of the dry fiber preform to form a hard interface between the second mold line tool and the portion of the dry fiber preform;
 - a vacuum bag encapsulating the second mold line tool and forming an air-tight seal around the hard interface;
 - 15 a resin supply connected in fluid communication with the dry fiber preform and supplying resin to the hard interface; and
 - a vacuum supply connected in fluid communication with the mold assembly, supplying vacuum pressure to the hard interface and drawing excess resin away from the hard interface such that the composite structure is tightly toleranced at
20 the hard interface after curing.
2. The mold assembly according to claim 1, wherein said second mold line tool includes a mold detail positioned at said hard interface such that said mold detail is imprinted on the composite structure.
25
3. The mold assembly according to claim 1, further including an external locating fixture rigidly fixed to the second mold line tool through an opening in the vacuum bag, said fixture positioning the second mold line tool within a tight tolerance.
30
4. The mold assembly according to claim 3, wherein said tight tolerance is within ± 0.015 inches or less.
5. The mold assembly according to claim 3, further including a mounting
35 seal sealing the opening in the vacuum bag against airflow.

5 6. The mold assembly according to claim 1, further comprising a plurality
of second mold line tools positioned on portions of the dry fiber preform, each second
mold line tool being encapsulated in the vacuum bag.

7. The mold assembly according to claim 1, wherein the vacuum supply
10 is connected to the mold assembly through a vacuum line passing through an
autoclave vessel.

8. The mold assembly according to claim 1, wherein the resin supply is a
liquid resin supply connected in fluid communication with the dry fiber preform
15 through a resin inlet line.

9. The mold assembly according to claim 1, wherein the resin supply is a
resin film disposed on the dry fiber preform.

20 10. A resin infusion mold assembly connected to a resin supply and a
vacuum supply for distributing a resin throughout a dry fiber preform, said mold
assembly comprising:

an outer mold line tool supporting the dry fiber preform and in fluid
communication with the resin supply such that resin is dispensed into the dry fiber
25 preform;

an inner mold line tool disposed on a portion of the dry fiber preform;
a vacuum bag encapsulating the inner mold line tool and sealed tight
against airflow, said vacuum bag in fluid communication with the vacuum supply
such that excess resin under the vacuum bag is drawn away from the dry fiber
30 preform;

an external locating fixture rigidly fixed to the inner mold line tool
through an opening in the vacuum bag, said fixture positioning the inner mold line
tool within a tight tolerance; and

a mounting seal sealing the opening in the vacuum bag against airflow.
35

11. The resin infusion mold assembly according to claim 10, wherein said
inner mold line tool includes a mold detail positioned at a hard interface between the
inner mold line tool and the portion of the dry fiber preform.

12. The resin infusion mold assembly according to claim 10, further comprising a plurality of inner mold line tools disposed on portions of the dry fiber preform and encapsulated in the vacuum bag.

10 13. The resin infusion mold assembly according to claim 10, wherein said tight tolerance is within ± 0.015 inches or less.

14. A resin infusion apparatus, comprising:
a resin infusion mold assembly, comprising
15 a first mold line tool,
a pre-bled fiber preform having a resin distributed therein, said
pre-bled fiber preform supported on the first mold line tool,
a second mold line tool disposed on a portion of the pre-bled
fiber preform,
20 a bag forming an air-tight encapsulation around the second
mold line tool and the portion of the pre-bled fiber preform, and
a conduit connected in fluid communication with the bag; and
an autoclave with a pressurized chamber containing the resin infusion
mold assembly and applying a pressure to the resin infusion mold assembly, the
25 conduit passing through an opening in the pressurized chamber such that the pressure
on the resin infusion mold assembly urges additional resin out of the resin infusion
mold assembly, through the conduit and out of the pressurized chamber.

15. The resin infusion apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the pre-
30 bled fiber preform has a fiber volume of at least 53%.

16. The resin infusion apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the
pressure in the autoclave is sufficient to urge resin from the resin infusion mold
assembly and increase the fiber volume of the fiber preform to at least 57%.

35

17. The resin infusion apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the mold
assembly further comprises an external locating fixture rigidly fixed to the second

5 mold line tool through an opening in the vacuum bag, said fixture positioning the
second mold line tool within a tight tolerance.

18. The resin infusion apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the mold
assembly further comprises a mounting seal sealing the opening in the vacuum bag
10 against airflow.

19. The resin infusion apparatus according to claim 18, wherein the tight
tolerance is within ± 0.015 inches or less.

15 20. The resin infusion apparatus according to claim 14, wherein said
second mold line tool includes a mold detail positioned at a hard interface between the
second mold line tool and the portion of the pre-bled fiber preform.

21. The resin infusion apparatus according to claim 20, further comprising
20 a plurality of second mold line tools positioned on portions of the dry fiber preform,
each second mold line tool being encapsulated in the vacuum bag.

~~22.~~ A method of vacuum assisted resin transfer molding, comprising:
forming a resin transfer assembly by positioning a dry fiber preform
25 on a tool and sealing at least a portion of the dry fiber preform in a vacuum bag;
positioning the resin transfer assembly in an autoclave;
infusing the resin into the dry fiber preform;
vacuum pressurizing a resin outlet line and bleeding resin out of the
fiber preform concurrent with pressurizing the resin inlet line;
30 detaching the resin inlet line; and
pressurizing the autoclave and bleeding additional resin out of the fiber
preform.

23. The method of claim 22, further comprising the step of attaching the
35 resin inlet line and the resin outlet line to the resin transfer assembly before
pressurizing the inlet and outlet lines.

5

24. The method of claim 22, wherein said steps of pressurizing the inlet and outlet lines result in a fiber volume fraction of at least 53% in the fiber preform.

10

25. The method of claim 24, wherein said step of pressurizing the autoclave results in a fiber volume fraction of at least 57% in the fiber preform.

15

26. The method of claim 22, wherein said step of forming a resin transfer assembly includes positioning a second tool on the portion of the dry fiber preform and sealing the second tool in the vacuum bag along with the portion of the dry fiber preform.

20

27. The method of claim 26, wherein said step of forming a resin transfer assembly further includes rigidly fixing an external locating fixture to the second tool through a hole in the vacuum bag and positioning the second tool within a tight tolerance.

25

28. The method of claim 27, wherein said step of forming a resin transfer assembly further includes sealing the hole in the vacuum bag against airflow with a mounting seal.

29. The method of claim 27, wherein said step of positioning the second tool within the tight tolerance includes positioning the tool within ± 0.015 inches or less.

30

30. The method of claim 26, wherein said step of forming a resin transfer assembly further includes positioning a mold detail on the second mold line tool at a hard interface between the second mold line tool and the portion of the dry fiber preform.

35

31. The method of claim 22, wherein said pressurizing the autoclave step includes drawing away the additional resin bled from the fiber preform through the resin outlet line.

Added